



## Esko A. Riikonen

69, serial entrepreneur, inventor, engineer, long-time Columbia, MD resident.

Esko A. Riikonen, age 69, of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, loving husband, father and grandfather, passed away on Tuesday, September 25, in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, following a long battle with cancer. Esko lived in the Columbia, MD area for more than twenty-five years.

Esko Antero Riikonen was born on December 11, 1942, in Ruokolahti, Finland, while the Soviet Army laid siege to the country during World War Two. Winning a national Finnish model airplane competition paved the way for Esko to learn how to fly gliders as a teenager, and also fueled a lifelong interest in engineering and mechanics. Esko graduated as a mechanical engineer from Lappeenranta Technical College, and then served in the Finnish military as an artillery officer. One summer job included running a shift for the Lappeenranta brewing and bottling company operations. Esko continued his education, later earning an Executive M.B.A from the University of Pittsburgh. Esko spoke five languages fluently, including Finnish, English, French, Swedish, and Russian.

Esko's career spanned four continents, numerous industries, and a series of successful entrepreneurial ventures. After serving as a sailor aboard a commercial oil tanker headed to the Black Sea, Esko joined the Swedish firm Huskvarna Vapen, where he designed parts for sewing machines and motorcycles. In 1971, Esko started his first entrepreneurial venture designing industrial piping systems. Esko later joined the Finnish company that became LAROX OY as a design engineer and, later, technical manager for the filtration and other equipment LAROX developed and sold worldwide for the paper and pulp, mining, and food manufacturing industries. As an executive, Esko traveled widely throughout Russia, Ukraine, Europe, Australia, Canada and the USA before settling in the United States to establish the company's U.S. subsidiary in 1982. Esko invented filters and valves, obtaining worldwide patents for his unique designs. In 1993, Esko started RF Technologies, Inc. in Columbia, MD, which sold Esko's patented valves around the world until 2010, when RF Technologies was sold to a South African company. Esko also was a co-founder of Spare Parts Depot, Inc., a company focused on supplying spare parts for large industrial filters. And in 1993, with his wife, Charlene Boothe Riikonen, Esko also co-founded Cera Products, Inc., a company that manufactures and distributes rice-based oral rehydration solutions throughout the United States and around the world.

In between starting businesses and designing new products, Esko pursued many hobbies and was an avid sportsman, excelling in hockey, fencing, skiing, flying, auto racing, sailing, wind-surfing, and golf. Esko's interest in sailing not only provided tremendous enjoyment, but it also afforded the opportunity to design, build, and sell hundreds of sailboats throughout Finland. Esko followed automobile racing closely, and enjoyed cheering the Finnish racers participating in Formula One.

Esko is survived by his wife of 23 years, Charlene Boothe Riikonen, three children, Katja-Maj Riikonen, Jyri Riikonen, and Tony Riikonen; three stepchildren, Cynthia Baird, Anthony Dale, and Jennifer Rapp; fourteen grand and step-grandchildren, Lotta-Maj Wilhelmiina Lahtinen, Pauli-Tapio Wiljami Lahtinen, Lalli-Jermu Welmeri Lahtinen, Romi Tobias Riikonen, Aku Mauri Riikonen, Christina Baird, Matthew Baird, John E. Dale, Fiona M. Dale, Charlotte F. Dale, Braden Rapp, Caitlin Rapp, Jett Rapp, and Kelsea Rapp; a sister, Ulla Riikonen Calvert; a brother, Matti Riikonen; and his mother, Silja Riikonen of Savonlinna, Finland. His brother Paavo Riikonen, died in 1993, also of cancer.

Memorial services will be held in Hilton Head Island, at the Island Funeral Home, 4 Cardinal Road, Hilton Head Island, SC 29926, at 3 pm on Sunday, September 30, 2012. Later in the year, friends will also be welcomed at the home of Steve and Carol Walters in Ellicott City, Maryland to celebrate Esko's life, and, during the Summer of 2013, his son Jyri Riikonen of Porvoo, Finland, has planned to organize a day boat ride, from Lappeenranta to Lake Saima, also to celebrate Esko's life with friends and family.

In lieu or instead of flowers, the family would welcome donations in memory of Esko A. Riikonen to the Child Health Foundation of Columbia Maryland at <http://childhealthfoundation.org>, Direct Relief International ([www.directrelief.org](http://www.directrelief.org)), or to the American Cancer Society.